Indexing epistemic primacy: Agreeing with the stand-alone deshoo in Japanese conversation

Category: discourse/pragmatics/sociolinguistics

When participants in conversation offer evaluations of particular states of affair, they must manage their relative epistemic rights to knowledge and information about the states of affair, and that their management of these rights is indexed by their practices of speaking (Heritage, 2002, 2011; Heritage & Raymond, 2005; Raymond & Heritage, 2006; Stivers, 2005; Stivers et al., 2011). This means that “even within sequences of action designed to achieve agreement (which are preferred) participants can become involved in complex negotiations concerning the management of their epistemic rights to knowledge and information” (Raymond & Heritage, 2006: 684). Prior conversation-analytic studies have shown various practices of speaking (e.g., negative interrogatives, ‘oh’-prefaced agreements, and modified repeats) through which participants index, or claim, their relative epistemic access to knowledge and information while they evaluate particular states of affair. These studies have also revealed how these participants manage their relative epistemic rights to evaluate the states of affair.

In the case of Japanese talk-in-interaction, as far as I am aware, very few studies have attempted to describe how Japanese speakers utilize different practices of speaking through which they manage their relative epistemic rights to knowledge and information (Hayano, 2011; Morita, 2002, 2005). These studies focused on the use of final particles such as yo, ne, and the combination of yo and ne, which are deployed in assessment sequences. They showed that these particles are resources to claim the speaker’s various epistemic stances about particular states of affair being assessed, relative to his or her co-participant. Of these studies, Hayano (2011), who exclusively concentrated on the use of the final particle yo, has argued that the yo-marked assessment is one of the resources to claim epistemic primacy from second position.

Using conversation analysis, I show that there is another grammatical resource by which the speaker who responds to a prior assessment claims epistemic primacy. The resource discussed in this study is a sentence-final expression, deshoo. More specifically, the study focuses on the use of deshoo, which is produced singly, or stands alone, without any additional elements in a single turn-constructional unit (TCU). To my knowledge, no studies have systematically investigated this particular resource from a conversation-analytic perspective. Based on the repeated observations of video-recorded naturally-occurring conversations, I demonstrate that the stand-alone deshoo emerges based on two specific types of sequential environments. One environment in which the use of the stand-alone deshoo becomes relevant is when a prior speaker has assessed a particular state of affairs by the use of the very same assessment term that the deshoo-speaker had utilized in the preceding talk. The second environment is when the prior speaker used the very assessment that had
previously been indicated by the deshoo-speaker in the preceding talk. In both cases, using the stand-alone deshoo, the deshoo-speaker appears to claim epistemic primacy in a way that he/she confirms or validates what is being assessed by the prior speaker. At the same time, the deshoo-speaker appears to indicate that the prior speaker’s mind is now perfectly attuned to the deshoo-speaker’s. This can be explained by the structure of the stand-alone deshoo completely parasitic to the prior turn and by the fact that the stand-alone deshoo uniformly expresses the speaker’s (often strong) agreement, unlike the yo-marked assessment, which frequently expresses the speaker’s disagreement (Hayano, 2011).

References


